

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 17870 131136Z
ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17870

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SCUL PINT IN
SUBJECT: APPOINTMENT OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN INDIA

REF: STATE 16545

1. CONTRARY TO REPORT IN REFTEL. MONSIGNOR DE NITTIS, HOLY SEE CONSELOR IN NRE DELHI, TOLD EMBOOF DECEMBER 11 THAT THERE IS NO PROGRESS IN EFFORTS TO HAVE GOI BACK DOWN FROM ITS CLAIM OF THE RIGHT OF PRIOR APPROVAL OF INDIAN BISHOPS. THERE ARE CURRENTLY VACANCIES IN SEVEN OF THE NINETY-FIVE BISHOPRIES WHICH THE VATICAN WILL NOT FILL UNTIL THE PREVIOUS SYSTEM OF SIMPLE NOTIFICATION TO THE GOI IS RESTORED. ASKED WHAT MINISTRY MIGHT HAVE INITIATED GOVERNMENT STANCE ON APPROVAL, DE NITTIS SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS THE HOME MINISTRY. FURTHER ASKED IF MRS. GANDHI WAS AWARE OF THE PROBLEM, DE NITTIS THOUGHT THAT SHE WAS INVOLVED. IN DE NITTIS' VIEW, GOI POSITION MIGHT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY GROUPS IN BOMBAY "WHO CALL THEMSELVES CATHOLIC" AND WHO FAVOR A NATIONAL CHURCH. HE MADE NO MENTION OF GOANS IN THIS CONNECTION. IDEED, IN DISCUSSING THE CHURCH IN GOA, HE SAID THAT THE PROBLEM WAS THAT THE GOAN CATHOLICS, PARTICULARLY THE MIDDLE-AGED AND ELDER CLERGY, CONSIDERED THEMSELVES OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM OF INDIAN LIFE.

2. DE NITTIS SAID THAT HE WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT A RETURN
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 17870 131136Z

TO THE STAU QUO ANTE. BUT IF THAT WERE NOT POSSIBLE,

HE SPECULATED, THE INDIAN CHURCH ITSELF MIGHT HAVE TO
PROTEST THE ISSUE. THE GOI, HE SAID, WAS SENSITIVE TO
THE CONCERNS OF ITS MINORITIES. SO FAR, THE PROBLEM
HAS BEEN HELD CLOSELY WITHIN THE HIERARCHY. THE MONSIGNOR
CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT THE TIME MIGHT COME WHEN THE
CHURCH WOULD HAVE TO GO PUBLIC.

SCHNEIDER

UNQUOTE

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NNN

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